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SUBJECT: Changes in Fujian Human Smuggling Patterns

REF: 05 Guangzhou 32942

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Fujian Border Control Police told the Consul General that the number of cases of human smuggling to the United States via sea has fallen. Human smuggling out of Fujian Province has increasingly involved traveling directly to the United States with legitimate visas or travel through third countries to Mexico, where Fujianese then cross the border. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) The Consul General and Consulate staff met with Chen Hao, Deputy Chief of Staff of Fujian Border Control Department on March 27th to discuss recent trends in human smuggling in Fujian Province. This meeting was a follow-up to a discussion held in December 2005.

¶3. (U) Chen told the Consul General that his Division did not distinguish between human trafficking and human smuggling crimes in its investigations, a statement that was similar to one made by the Director General during the 2005 meeting (reftel); then, as now, human smuggling was viewed as an "illegal border crossing."

¶4. (U) Chen introduced examples of recent human smuggling trends in Fujian. He proudly noted that there had not been a case of human smuggling to the United States by sea since 2005. While his Division discovered 13 cases involving 253 people in 2000, it has not encountered additional cases since. Chen attributed this decline to rapid economic development, the local government's public awareness and enforcement campaign, and a change in people's attitudes in response to the Golden Venture tragedy at Rockaway Beach, NY in 1999. In its place, Chen remarked, a new method of smuggling has arisen.

¶5. (U) Increasingly, the preferred method is to acquire legitimate visas for direct entry to the U.S. or to transit through third countries to reach Mexico and eventually cross the U.S.-Mexican border. In the latter case, the most common transit countries are Russia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and South Africa. Chen said that although more expensive than smuggling by sea, this appeal of this method was the relative lack of danger. The price for this smuggling method was between seventy and eighty thousand dollars per person, though the "snakehead" or smuggler only netted ten thousand dollars as much of the money was needed to pay bribes and other smuggling costs. Chen claimed that the smuggler only received the money if the smuggled person actually reached the United States.

¶6. (U) Chen said that many people in Fuzhou's Changle District, which is a well known source of illegal immigration into the States, are now opening businesses such as steel or textile factories. Some even have returned from the States to their hometown to take advantage of China's rapidly developing economy. As a result, he said, emigration from Changle has dropped.

¶7. (U) Chen took note of other recent developments, such as a shift from Japan to South Korea as a destination point for smuggling and a decline in the number of Fujianese men smuggled to work on Taiwanese fishing boats. By contrast, Taiwan still remains a common destination for mainland women forced to work in the island's sex industry. These women have been deceived by smugglers and come from all over China, though very few are from Fujian. According to Chen, there were once over 20,000 mainland women forced into prostitutes and subsequently detained in Taiwan. All of them had been repatriated to the mainland by the end of February this year. Fujian's border control police are responsible for receiving these women by boat. The police treat them as victims of human smuggling and help them return home. Chen confessed they did not - or were unable to - provide psychological counseling to them due to the shortage of qualified staff. Only women who repeatedly smuggle themselves into Taiwan will face administrative or criminal penalty. The threshold is three illegal border crossings a year.

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